

THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS

Part III

Messages for Both the Saved and the Unsaved

By Arlen L. Chirwood

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life [‘soul’] shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life [‘soul’] for my sake shall find it.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:24-26).

In the preceding verses, the word “life” appears twice in verse twenty-five and the word “soul” appears twice in verse twenty-six. Both words are translations of the Greek word *psuche*, meaning either “soul” or “life.” But, to avoid confusion, *psuche* should be translated and understood in a consistent manner in both verses, as either “soul” or “life.”

Within *man’s triune being* (body, soul, and spirit [I Thess. 5:23]), *the eternal salvation* which he either already has or can have through faith in Christ has to do, during present time, with his “*spirit*” alone, not with his “soul” or “body” (John 3:6).

Salvation in Scripture is seen inseparably associated with *the complete gospel message, the complete preaching of the cross, the complete man* (spirit, soul, and body) comprising past, present, and future aspects of all.

We have been saved (past, having to do with “the spirit”), *we are being saved* (present, having to do with “the soul”), and *we are about to be saved* (future, having to do with the realization of the salvation of “the soul,” along with “the body”).

(For additional information on this subject, refer to the author’s book, “Salvation of the Soul.”)

Note that the text (Matt. 16:24-26) can only be dealing with *saved individuals*. The unsaved *CANNOT possibly be in view*. Spiritual values are involved, and spiritually the unsaved are dead (Eph. 2:1, 5). “Life” *MUST* first be imparted. They *MUST* first pass “from death unto life” (John 5:24).

No unsaved person could ever be told to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ.

He could do the first part (deny self), though doing this *could only have to do with the natural man, the man of flesh, and could NEVER result in spiritual values, his salvation, etc.* But he couldn’t possibly do the second part (take up his cross), for he has no cross to take up. He, apart from Christ, is *alienated from the cross*. And he couldn’t do the third part either (follow Christ), for *the spiritual part of the man is dead, separated from Christ*.

On the other hand, this verse relates *EXACTLY* what a saved person is supposed to do — *MUST DO, IF...* — with the next two verses providing commentary on the matter.

He is *to deny himself*, which has to do with the soul (the seat of the person’s emotions, feelings, desires). He is to deny the fleshly impulses of the soul, keep them in check, in subjection to the man of spirit (*cf.* Gen. 16:9; 21:9, 10; Gal. 4:22-31; 5:17-21).

Then he is *to take up his cross*. Saved man, unlike unsaved man, has a cross, for he has been “crucified with Christ.” The cross is *the instrument of death*, and saved man taking up his cross can only be seen as synonymous with *dying to self, then living unto God in resurrection power (pertaining to the third day, the third thousandth year) as he follows Christ* (Gal. 2:20; 5:24).

And, relative to the preceding, the Christian can only go in *ONE OF TWO DIRECTIONS*, as seen in verse twenty-five. He can do as commanded in verse twenty-four and *realize present and future aspects of the salvation of his soul*; or, he can fail to do as commanded in verse twenty-four and *fail to realize present and future aspects of the salvation of his soul*.

There is *NO MIDDLE GROUND* on the preceding, and there are *NO EXCEPTIONS*. *ALL CHRISTIANS* are included; *NONE* are excluded.

Now, note the context on both sides of Matt. 16:24-26 to see how *the whole of the matter has to do with not only the preaching of the cross to the saved but where this takes Christians in the end who follow or do not follow the Lord’s instructions*.

Context, Preceding Matt. 16:24-26

“He [Jesus] saith unto them [His disciples], But whom say ye that I am?”

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven...

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matt. 16:15-17, 21-23).

There are two contrasting scenes in the preceding verses, both having to do with Peter.

In the first (vv. 15-17), Peter, responding to the Lord’s question, was blessed, with his response *associated with information received from the Father in heaven*.

In the second (vv. 21-23), exactly the opposite occurred. Peter’s response was *associated with Satanic activity here on earth*. And, because it was so far removed from God’s plans and purposes for man, Jesus told Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan” (*lit.*, “Get opposite me, Satan,” *i.e.*, “Get away from me, for your opposition to the work that I am about to perform is of Satan, not of the Father” [*cf.* John 8:28-47]).

1) Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona

When Jesus and His disciples came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked them, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matt. 16:13). They responded with different names and thoughts, ranging from the ancient Prophets to John the Baptist (v. 14). Then Jesus, re-asking the question, made it very personal: "But whom say ye that I am?" (v. 15).

Then Simon Peter spoke up and gave the best response possible: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). And Jesus acknowledged the veracity and completeness of Peter's response by saying, "Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (v. 17).

Simon Peter, with that succinct statement, spoke volumes. *Everything* was there regarding the proper identity of both Jesus on earth and the Father in heaven.

Jesus was declared to be "*the Christ, the One Who would rule and reign, the Son of the living God.*"

Only "Sons" can rule in God's kingdom. But Jesus was declared to be *a particular, specific Son*. He was declared to be "*the Son of the One true and living God,*" completely separate from sonship and/or rulership associated with "the gods of the [Gentile] nations" (II Chron. 32:13-15; Ps. 96:5).

Matthew 16:15-17 presents *the positive side* of the matter, and seeing why, of course, is evident. Now, note *the negative side* of the matter in the continuing verses in Matthew's gospel.

2) Get thee behind me, Satan

Following Peter's statement concerning Jesus' true identity and Jesus' response regarding this statement, Peter, evidently because of the nature of that which he had stated about Jesus' identity, remained foremost among the disciples when Jesus called attention to building His "Church" and "the keys of the kingdom of the heavens" (vv. 18, 19).

(For information on Matt. 16:19, refer to the author's pamphlet, "Keys of the Kingdom.")

Then, Jesus seemingly moved in a direction away from Peter's previous statement by charging His disciples "that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ" (v. 20). But this charge was not directing them away from that which Peter had just stated at all. Rather, this charge had to do with directing their attention to *that which He must now do in order to fully achieve the goal seen in Peter's previous statement* (v. 21).

Though the offer of the kingdom of the heavens remained open to Israel, as previously seen regarding something similar (Matt. 12, 13), *matters moved centrally away from this offer to statements concerning Calvary and the Church*. And the events of Calvary are inseparably connected with the reason that the Church was brought into existence.

Note that *far more exists concerning the events of Calvary than just a preaching of the cross to the unsaved*. *The events of Calvary also allow for a continued aspect to the overall salvation message, seen in the continuing verses of this chapter in Matthew's gospel* (vv. 24-26).

This is why, according to Heb. 12:2, that Christ, "for the joy that was set before him [*the day when He would rule and reign* (Matt. 25:21, 23)] endured the cross, despising the shame," *which is EXACTLY what Christians MUST DO as well if they are to have a part with Christ in that coming day* (cf. John 12:24; II Tim. 2:4-12)

This is what Peter, opposing Christ's impending work at Calvary, did not understand. And this accounts for *Christ's sharp rebuke* following Peter's previous statement concerning Jesus' identity.

Context, Following Matt. 16:24-26

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Verily I say unto you. There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,

And was transfigured before them..." (Matt. 16:27-17:2a).

Then, following Matt. 16:24-26, *the direction toward which all things in Scripture move is dealt with*. The continuing text takes one to the time of Christ's return. And, for Christians, "*rewards*" will be forthcoming at this time, something which will have previously been determined at the judgment seat (v. 27).

(The Greek word translated "reward" is *misthos*, and translating this word as "reward" could leave a wrong understanding of what is in view. *Misthos* has to do with *payment or wages for services rendered, one completely commensurate with the other*.

Thus, *there could be both positive and negative ramifications to the matter* — much work, much payment; little work, little payment; no work, no payment.)

And, continuing with the text, "rewards," *payment for services rendered*, is then seen to have to do with *the coming kingdom*.

Jesus declared that some of the individuals present, listening to Him, *would not die until they had seen "the Son of man coming in his kingdom"* (v. 28). And this is EXACTLY what three of them saw six days later, foreshadowing 6,000 years, when Jesus took Peter, James, and John "up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them..." (Matt. 17:1ff).

They didn't see something like the Son of man coming in His kingdom (*i.e.*, a foreview of that coming day). They were moved ahead in time, 2,000 years, and *saw EXACTLY what the text states*.

And that's what the dual aspect of the preaching of the cross is about, *necessitating Christ's finished work at Calvary for THE COMPLETE MESSAGE*.

The initial part of the message has to do with "the unsaved," bringing a person into a position where he can realize that which lies beyond.

And *the continuing part of the message, having to do with "the saved," has to do with man ultimately realizing the reason, purpose for his salvation*.

And ALL has to do with the coming kingdom.

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